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SCARRED SKULLS FROM FLORIDA

FRANK HAMILTON CUSHING

While conducting last winter (in the interest of the Bureau of American Ethnology and of the University of Pennsylvania) the excavation of Safford and other burial mounds near Tarpon springs, western Florida, I unearthed the skeletal remains of more than six hundred individuals. Of the better preserved skulls of adults among these remains, about nine in fifty were of special interest as exhibiting crest-ridges; that is, on each, extending from the frontal apex backwardly and divergently along either side of the coronal and to the parietal regions, was a slight but very marked and regular ridge formed by a papuloid growth of bone, which seemed to have resulted from the cicatrization of the scalp, caused by the shaving or the removal otherwise of hair from the sides of the head and by the singeing or cauterization of the scalp along the lines indicated, so as, by preventing growth, to sharply define the lateral boundaries of the hairy crests thus left.

Now, it is a well-known fact that certain classes of men among the southern tribes—notably those of the Maskokean confederacy, the Creeks, especially—wore the hair in erect crests, cropped and narrow in front, broadening rearwardly to the back of the head, where it was allowed to grow to the normal length, and whence it depended in each case, either naturally like a tail, or bound about with fur or stuffs to form the so-called scalp-lock. The researches of Gatschet make it evident that this was the special hair-dress of the warrior class (see portrait of Tomochichi, a Yamasee war-chief, in Urlsperger, vol. 1). He finds that in the Creek language *tás-sa* (Hichiti *Tás-si*) signifies alike “jay or kingfisher” (“crested bird”) and “hair-crest,” while *Tas-si ka-ya* signifies “warrior” (lit., “crest standing up”—that is, “he of the erectile crest”). From other sources it appears that as the jay was regarded more powerful in resisting even birds of prey than were any other birds of his kind, as was also the kingfisher, so nearly resembling him—more powerful than other birds of his kind, because of their shrill and startling cries and their habits of erecting (when alarmed in defending or wrathful in

offending) their hair-like crests. Wherefore the crest of the jay and of the male kingfisher, and even of the martin, came to be imitated (reproduced, so far as possible) in the head-dress (or aspect) of the warrior—the wrathful defender of his people and their homes.

The significance of this primitive tendency to liken the man either to his totem or to the animal whose distinguishing traits and (supposedly) corresponding functions were essential to the office held by the man is singularly illustrated, not only by the animistically and otherwise painted human masks of the collections which we later gathered, but also by certain other skulls in this same collection, in which such resemblances and their (supposedly) associated potencies were sought to be effected by actual distortions of the cranium itself; as in the case of one skull artificially flattened and broadened in the frontal and coronal regions, evidently in order to heighten its resemblance to the characteristic form of the head of the mountain lion or puma, since it was found associated with the fragments of a sacrificial bowl on which the symbols of the puma were prominently and dually depicted. With this evidence in mind, it was not difficult to infer, and measurably to ascertain, that other artificially deformed skulls in the collections had been given their characteristic shapes to liken them to and thereby to confer upon their possessors the powers and relationships of, totemic or other animals; as, for example, of the snake and the tortoise especially—and it would seem that this helps us to a fairly clear understanding of the significance of the real object in primitive skull distortion the world over, namely, that such distortions (and other like mutilations of person) were designed not so much as tests of pain—evidences of endurance on the part of the warrior or other candidate—as to confer through actual physical resemblance actual ideally conceived animal powers.

PUEBLO ARCHITECTURE.—*The American Architect*, published at Boston, announces the publication during the year of a series of illustrated articles, by Cosmos Mindeleff, on "Pueblo Architecture." Mr Mindeleff's memoir on the "Cliff Dwellings of Canyon de Chelly, Arizona," will be published by the Bureau of American Ethnology in the course of a few months.